Abraham Lincoln

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant

http://www.archive.org/details/charleswfairbank00fair

Charles W. Fairbanks,

Lincoln Day Banquet, Union League of Maryland

and the Young Men's Republican Club,

Baltimore, Md.,

February 12, 1907.

L. G. Dynes Printing Co.
Indianapolis.

ADDRESS OF CHARLES W. FAIRBANKS

Mr. Toastmaster and Gentlemen: The theme which engages our attention tonight is no new one. Indeed, during two score years it has been more in the hearts and upon the tongues of our countrymen than any other. It has been the attractive subject of the poet, the painter, the sculptor, the historian and the orator. It has been woven into the immortal story of our national progress. We have become familiar with every phase and feature of his life and character and we do not grow weary with its frequent contemplation. While the story is, indeed, as familiar as a household word, we delight in the retelling of it.

It is a reassuring fact that our countrymen generally give themselves over to an appropriate observance of this day, for it is ineed, a holy day in our history. It is a day in which the American people may bathe their souls in the atmosphere of a higher and better patriotism. The name of Lincoln rests upon our land as a sweet benediction.

Baltimore was not always so hospitable to the name of Abraham Lincoln as she is to-day. When the great Emancipator went to Washington to assume the grave responsibilities of his high office, the plans of his journey were concealed from this great city. But what a mighty change since then! There were those here who then greatly misjudged him, and how greatly he was misjudged. To-day there is no place within the limits of our beloved Republic where the name of Lincoln is more

revered or where it will be more secure than in the generous and patriotic hearts of the people of Baltimore, and their children forever and forever.

Abraham Lincoln was in the truest and best sense a man of the people. His sympathies were as broad as the needs of humanity. He was born and tutored amidst those hard conditions which develop that which is noblest and best in the human heart. From the humblest station he rose to the highest place among men. His birth was not heralded by pomp and ceremony. The entire world mourned at his bier. He had a high conception of public duty. He sought to exalt his fellow men, to strengthen the foundations of American institutions. He was inspired neither by the spirit of vain glory nor by mere thought of self. He never wavered in his allegiance to duty—duty to country, duty to humanity and duty to the ever living God. He set an example of loyal unselfish devotion to his fellow men that is unsurpassed in all the ample history with which we are familiar.

What a brave and gentle spirit! Great in its modesty and modest in its greatness! He left it to others to proclaim his virtues. His mighty deeds were their own herald.

He loved liberty and so loved it that he wished that all men might be free. He loved the American flag and so loved it that he wished that no stain should rest upon it and that all of the children of men might stand upright in the enjoyment of the priceless jewel of freedom. He comprehended within the ample scope of his purpose freedom to all, irrespective of race and condition.

What a mighty impulse there is in the power of a great and good name. The name of Lincoln will continue an uplifting influence, a power for good for centuries to come. If in all of our splendid history we had done no more than give to the future

the name of Lincoln, we would be entitled to the undying gratitude of those who shall come after us. In the contemplation of his career, eulogy becomes mere commonplace. We confess our inability accurately to portray this historic figure; historic, yet his influence so pervades our atmosphere that it almost seems as though he were yet alive and a potent figure in our midst. More than forty years have come and gone since his great work closed, yet he stands before us as vividly as though still clothed with his mighty power.

He was a partisan because he knew that beneficient ends could be accomplished through the instrumentality of party and not otherwise. He was elevated to place and power by the divided judgment of the American people but all parties and all peoples now claim him as their own, for all see in the tragic events through which he passed and of which he was a part the guiding hand of an overmastering Providence. In a large sense he was not the instrument of men. As we recede from the day in which he lived and wrought, his name does not diminish. It but grows greater and brighter in the receding years and stands in full and everlasting fellowship as one of America's great trinity of Liberators, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and William McKinley.

Lincoln laid down the Golden Rule of American politics, the rule he professed and the rule he practiced, the rule of which he was, indeed, the perfect incarnation—Malice towards none; charity for all. This was a good code then; it is good now and should guide us in the future. There never was an hour when observance of it was more essential than in the present. By it men should be governed in all of their relations with each other, particularly in the consideration and determination of those great problems which lie at the foundation of social and

national progress. In the face of questions which make for the weal or woe of a great people, we should bury forever those small non-essential differences which merely tend to vex and weaken the great army of the people in their contest for the triumph of justice and the victory of right.

Lincoln had a fixed, unchanging faith in the virtue of our political institutions. He believed them to be the best hope of mankind and felt that their destruction meant to blot out the last real assurance of liberty among men. He looked upon slavery with dread, not only because it was a monstrous wrong but because it imperilled the Republic. With true prophetic genius he declared: "A house divided against itself can not stand. I believe this government can not permanently endure half slave and half free." This utterance aroused the nation to her supreme peril and marked the real beginning of the debate which was decided upon the battle fields of the Republic.

He was compelled to walk in new and untried paths, beset with countless dangers. No one had theretofore gone his way. No one but a strong man, a man of faith and power and spotless purpose could have carried the country so safely through the dangers which beset her, as did he.

He was as "patient as destiny." He was neither moved by those who would go too fast nor deterred by those who would not go at all. He foresaw with rare precision the appropriate hour and struck when it arrived. He had superb faith in the triumph of his cause. He knew that slavery must perish or the Republic die and he believed that the Republic was immortal.

He was a Christian, though not a professor of the Christian religion. When the hour was darkest he sought the ever-lasting throne for strength and guidance. He believed in an overruling Providence in the affairs of the great Republic.

He chose with rare discrimination men suited to the arduous work in the Cabinet and in the field. He did not hesitate to call about him the nation's greatest, lest they should over-shadow him. Around his council table sat men who would worthily have filled the chief executive chair, and the captains he selected to lead our armies to ultimate victory rank among the greatest military heroes the world has produced. There were some who were called into his counsel who felt that they were more than a match for their chief and they sought to lead. They soon found that the plain citizen from the west was, not alone by reason of his place but by virtue of his own inherent worth, the undisputed head of his own administration; that he possessed all the qualities of a successful executive; that he was a consummate master of diplomacy; that he was, in short a statesman in the highest and best sense.

There was never an hour in all of his matchless career when he was not both trusted and distrusted. Few men in American politics were ever more sharply criticised and more cruelly impeached than he. "Criticism" is indeed too polite a word. "Abuse" is more appropriate. His ability and his patriotic purpose were alike frequently challenged. His detractors are now forgotten and his figure has risen into historic proportions. It was only when his last hour had come that his defamers disappeared and all people comprehended his disinterested enlightened and patriotic purposes, but at all times the great body of his countrymen believed in, trusted and followed him.

Many of the problems with which Abraham Lincoln was obliged to deal, have been solved and their solution has the approving verdict of history. Each day brings its questions and its responsibilities. They will be solved as Lincoln solved his by bringing to their consideration patience, patriotic

purpose and an enlightened judgment. The principles of righteousness and justice are as changeless as the unchanging stars. Difficulties may arise which for the moment seem to overtax our capacity, but if we bring to their consideration the unwearying patience, that sublime faith in the ultimate triumph of truth over error which inspired Abraham Lincoln, that solution will be attained which is in harmony with the principles which lie at the foundation of American institutions.

Lincoln believed in the supremacy of the law—the law enacted by the chosen agents of a self-governing people, law born of liberty. He taught men that ultimate security rests in the observance of each other's rights. In the midst of the storm he was calm and moved forward with serene unclouded vision to the accomplishment of his great purpose. He taught the lesson exemplified in his own career that in America opportunity invites the humblest and that place and power are open to the worthy, no matter where they have been cradled.

In hours of doubt and uncertainty in the course of our national career we may turn to the life and services of Abraham Lincoln for inspiration. We find it in all an illustration of the fact that men honor most those who best serve their fellow men and who seek to exalt their day and generation. Abraham Lincoln stood for America, America unified in law and solidified in sentiment, in interest, in aspiration. He stood for all sections and for all conditions of men. He cherished in his heart neither hate nor resentment. He struck, not in anger but in love; to unify and not to destroy. He sought to hold within the sacred circle of American influence the entire people and the whole country. With prophetic vision he saw the future of America, how she was to become one of the greatest and the mightiest nations upon the globe, and that her true

grandeur must be realized through the abolition of racial distinctions in the law and through the supremacy of the law, before which all men, created in the image of their Maker, should stand equal. The question uppermost in the days of Lincoln, uppermost to-day and which will be uppermost to-morrow, is the question of securing men everywhere in those rights which find their enunciation in the immortal Declaration of Independence. America has been and is and will be the land of opportunity, the land where the humblest among us, as well as the greatest, stand before the law upon a plane of absolute equality. Equality is the object for which our Republic was founded, for which untold thousands have gone down to the battle fields and won eternal glory. He stood always and everywhere for the rights of men. He stood for the rights of labor and for the rights of capital. He believed in those policies which gave to each the largest field of opportunity, believing full well that their interests were so co-related that they must, in the final analysis, stand or fall together.

National unity for which Lincoln stood was established through sacrifices which no one but Omnipotence can measure. Great as they were, the end accomplished was worth the terrific cost. Not until the great question of national unity had been determined in the stern arbitrament of war did the American people arise to an adequate conception of the real virtue and tremendous strength of the great Republic. We rejoice as we contemplate the life and services of the great leader in a grave national emergency, that we have a country, not only one politically, but one in sentiment and destiny. Bitterness and distrust have disappeared and the millions of Americans rejoice in a common brotherhood and in their undivided and indivisible fealty to a common flag.

Lincoln's great strength lay with the people. He trusted them and they believed in him. He would peril all for them and they would willingly place their all upon the sacrificial altar of the Republic for the cause for which he stood. They knew he sought place and power for no personal aggrandizement but that he might better serve his fellowmen. Place with him was not the end. It was merely the opportunity to advance the welfare of his country and his countrymen.

He was a great lawyer, a great executive, a great orator. "Great" is a much abused word when applied to men, but it is appropriate when we speak of Lincoln. He met the demands of every relation of life in amplest measure. No exigency exhausted his power. His reserve strength was always unimpaired.

He had his faults as all men have but they were so small when compared with his luminous virtues that we lose all thought of them. "Even his failings leaned to virtue's side."

Fifty-seven years is but a brief period. It comprehended the birth and the death of the great Emancipator. They were years of work, years of defeat and years of triumph. They spanned an epoch in American history of unparalleled achievement the like of which we shall not look upon again.

How like the irony of fate it seems that after he had led his people for four long and weary years through the Red Sea he should not have been permittted to enjoy the promised land. But "he lived until he stood in the midst of universal joy, beneath the outstretched wings of peace, the foremost man in all the world." When he fell at the post of duty both North and South lost their best and greatest friend and mingled their tears in a common sorrow.

It is given us to see but a little way into the future. What the morrow will bring forth it is not permitted us to know, but we have an abiding faith that tomorrow will be better than to-day and that as century follows century in their majestic procession to the ages, our country will become stronger and our institutions will grow in true nobility.

The name and fame of Abraham Lincoln are a part of the fadeless glory of the great Republic; yes, a part of the rich heritage of the race. His name will be cherished and honored so long as men honor exalted service in behalf of mankind. Yes monarchies will rise and fall, republics will be born and die, civilizations will grow and fade away, but the name of Abraham Lincoln will survive as one of the few names which were born to immortality.